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THE
Life * and * Times

OF

George R. Young,

BY

ROBERT GRANT.



1886 :

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"When this cometh to pass, (lo, it will come,) then shall they know that a prophet hath been among them."—Ezek. 33: 33.

To some extent, at least, the words of my motto have been verified in the case of him, whose name graces my title page. It is the name of George R. Young—a name that was once a household word in many parts of the Lower Provinces; and, to-day, after the lapse of 33 years, the very mention of it causes many an old Pictou warrior to cock his ears—"Trojan and Tyrian," with grateful ardour, conspiring to do it honour. The design of the following pages is to do justice to his memory. But previous to making my unpretending attempt "his merits to disclose," I must first refer to Nova Scotia's intellectual history.

During the last 150 years, Nova Scotia has produced more than its quota of "eminent men". And that Plutarch that shall yet appear and write their history will find that he has his hands full. By the time he shall have rehearsed their names, thoroughly mastered their literary, forensic, and scholastic attainments, and recorded their achievements as authors, orators, and warriors, he will have the satisfaction of having done something that Macaulay was never fit to do. In addition to the McCulloch's, Blanchard's, Dawson's and McDonald's of Pictou, he will meet such names as Touge, Simpson, Salter, Bowers, Charles R. Fairbanks, T. C. Haliburton, S. G. W. Archibald, Bermish Murdoch, Lawrence, O'Connor, Doyle, two or three Uniacks, as many Wilkenses, J. W. Johnston, John Young and his three sons, Joseph Howe, Sir John Ingles, and Sir Fenwick Williams, not to mention any more. Here is a constellation of names that would shed lustre on the annals of any nation—that king loms would be proud of. Some of them were literally "sons of thunder"—quite competent to wield any "fierce democracy", or

"Shake the Senate with a Tully's force."

Others, such as Ingles and Williams, were "Thunder bolts of war." The one, amidst the horrors of Lucknow, and the other, at the siege of Kars, performed feats of valour that secured for them the thanks of a more illustrious senate than Julius Cæsar ever saw.

The very name of Young is possessed of its attractions. Who would prefer the bloom of youth to the decrepitude of age? That savage bird the eagle would be more detested than it is were it not that it can periodically renew its youth. The witch of Endor herself may once have had her admirers. If so, it must have been in the days of her "sweet sixteen", when age, and repeated disappointments had not soured her temper, and driven the last remnant of the "tender passion" from her breast. Even of the saints in heaven, it has been said that they shall "flourish in immortal youth." So let it ever be in Nova Scotia, with the honoured name of "Young". So let it specially be with him whose name and deserved fame it is the design of this sketch to perpetuate.

Almost every one knows that George R. Young was the son of the celebrated John Young. He was born in July 1802, and would thus be in his 12th year when his father landed in Halifax, in 1814. He was some years the junior of his eldest brother, the present Sir William Young, to whose abilities and splendid eloquence Nova Scotia has, for half a century, been so much indebted.

The subject of this sketch would no doubt pass the most of his boyhood in Halifax. But the fact that Agricola was his father, and that his mother was a woman of rare accomplishments is a sufficient guarantee that his education would not be neglected. His college training he received at the Pictou Academy. Michael McCulloch, John McLean, Jotham Blanchard, Hugh Ross, Angus McGillivray, etc., were his class mates. Even then, he gave indications of first-rate abilities. He particularly excelled in eloquence. For this latter assertion my authority is the late Rev. Angus McGillivray. Dr. McCulloch was a great favourite with his students. To this rule George R. Young is said to have been an exception. There is a tradition that the doctor was no favourite with him. If so, Mr. Young would have his own reasons for his dislike. One thing is certain. In those days there was little love lost between the Young's and the McCulloch's.

For some time, Mr. Young was a hard worker on his father's farm of Willow Park, and I have it on good authority that he was a first-rate ploughman. At the age of about 23 he commenced the publication of the Nova Scotian newspaper. Of this periodical, so famous in our provincial history, he was sole editor and proprietor. In 1828 he sold out to Mr. Howe. He then, at the age of 25, commenced the study of law, at the instance of his brother William. In 1834, he was admitted to the bar. Every one knows that his career, as a lawyer, was a successful one. In some of the external graces of forensic eloquence he may have been excelled by his own brother, as well as by the Johnstons, the Grays, and the Uniackes of the day. But in legal acumen, and profound research into the most difficult departments of his profession, George R. Young was quite competent to hold his own with the best of them. In labors and unwearied application he outstripped them all. He would have nothing to do with defending a doubtful case. In these instances he would advise parties to settle. But when the party had right and truth on his side, he would be the very man to see that his client's cause would be conducted to a successful issue. Hard work with late or early hours had no terror for George R. Young. While his opponents lay slumbering on the bed of lazy security, he would be ransacking legal authorities and precedents. Messengers would be dispatched to distant places for evidence bearing on the case. And, on the ensuing day, he would make his appearance in court with the indications of victory depicted in his very countenance.

Mr. Young, for a period of 9 years devoted all his energies to the duties of his profession. During this time he was distinguished for his studious habits, and for more than ordinary talent. The *Nova Scotian* was conducted by Mr. Howe, but its columns were frequently enriched by contributions from Mr. Young's pen. These were possessed of much merit. For the art of composition he had a natural facility. He

wielded the pen of a ready writer. Through the medium of the press, he occasionally gave utterance to his thoughts in passages of tremendous power and rare beauty.

About the year 1838 Mr. Young visited England; and while there, the same ardent thirst for knowledge characterized his every movement. The principal literary and scientific institutions in Britain were visited by him. The result of these observations was speedily conveyed to Nova Scotians through the columns of the Newspapers of the day, and that in "thoughts that breathed and words that burned." Mr. Howe frequently reminded his patrons of their indebtedness to what he termed the "industrial pen of George R. Young." In reviews, magazines, etc., I have read descriptions of debates in the House of Lords and the House of Commons, when Lyndhurst, Brougham, O'Connell and Stanley were the actors on the stage. But this I do say: I never read anything so lifelike and satisfactory as those sketches given by Mr. Young. The reader will find them at pages 225-236 of his work on Colonial Literature.

It was in the year 1843 that Mr. Young's public life may be said to have properly commenced. In December of that year there was a general election. Then, as often since, the liberals of Pictou were at their wits end. A succession of defeats was quenching every aspiration for success. They were literally "sheep without a shepherd." There were J. D. B. Fraser's, A. P. Ross', Primrose's, Patterson's and MacGregor's without number. And, in the estimation of petty cliques at Pictou and New Glasgow, these were all prodigies—any one of them were just the man to gain an election, and drive despised Tories to their native woods. At one time an Abraham Patterson is set up to show how fields are won. So, one day in November, 1836, he mounts the hustings; but the next day he "vanquished quits the field." In 1840, a James MacGregor comes to the rescue. Surely hard hearted Kirkmen will relent now, when they see the son of the apostle of Pictou. The uncircumcised of New Larig, Gairloch, and Mount Thom will now "hide their diminished heads." Vain hope. The want of numbers is something that neither parental sanctity nor filial piety can supply. McColls and McLeans might chase the children of the Kirk like frightened sheep along the streets. But, at Merigomish, this same ecclesiastical progeny would return their candidates at the head of the poll.

Such was the state of parties in Pictou at the general election of 1843. It was to come off in December. But what to do was more than man could devise. So after repeated consultations, it was agreed to invite Mr. Young to contest the county in the liberal interest. In compliance with said invitation he came through to Pictou at once. On horseback, and alone, he speedily visited different parts of the County. He surveyed the strongholds of his multitudinous opponents. He "shook his gauntlet at their towers." And though he knew he had a mighty majority to contend with, it is to be doubted if the idea of being defeated ever entered his head. He was then in the prime of life—the very personification of robust health. And to me, at least, it was one

of the greatest treats of my life to watch his every gesture. In reference to him, at this period, I would apply the words :

"I have seen the dumb flock to see him."

"And the blind to hear him speak."

People then, for the first time, felt that they had *one of themselves* to conduct them to an assured victory. For three long weeks the battle raged and Mr. Young was returned with a majority of 38. Mr. Blackadar his opponent petitioned the legislature against his return. But after the fullest investigation by a committee of that tribunal, Mr. Young held his seat.

Mr. Young's first election in Pictou was watched with much interest in other parts of the province, and it is but due to him to assert, as I hereby do, that his success on that occasion, was altogether owing to his own superior generalship. I also affirm that the man that could acquit himself with more ability, on that occasion, did not exist in Nova Scotia, *even if they were* the days of Howe, Doyle, and J. B. Uniacke.

From 1843 to 1847, Mr. Young was a man of some mark in our provincial parliament. If not one of the most fluent, he was one of the most *effective* debaters in it. He had, long ago, mastered the whole science of constitutional government. On questions requiring a knowledge of statistics and finance none would, with impunity, enter the lists with him. Even his bitterest opponents would admit that the rights of his own constituents were well seen to, a fact that can yet be attested by hundreds of living witnesses.

At the general election of 1847, Mr. Young, was triumphantly returned for Pictou by an overwhelming majority, and in January 1848 he committed the first mistake of his life. He came a member of a hostile cabinet. From 1845 to 1850, he was the only public man in Nova Scotia that interested himself in the construction of Railways. In advocating this means of modern improvement he laboured indefatigably and gratuitously. By his writings through the press, he did much to awaken the public mind. He also addressed public meetings in Quebec and other places. More than once, and at his own private expense, he crossed the Atlantic to consult capitalists, and arouse Colonial Secretaries in Downing Street, to a sense of their duty to the colonies. On these occasions, his reports whether printed or oral, did not consist of inflated rehearsals of the exploits of fathers or grandfathers. They were replete with statistics, and samples of correct reasoning. In the pursuit of his object he may have been too sanguine. But, so far as has ever been known to me, none ever questioned the purity of his motives. In this manner he laboured for some years. But all this time and under his very feet, there lay a deadly serpent coiled "in the grass." That serpent was Mr. Howe. Up to 1850 the latter did next to nothing in the cause of Railways. But in September of that year, by an act of the blackest treachery, he utterly supplanted Mr. Young in his well meant exertions to secure the benefits of Railway communication. From the shock received Mr. Young never recovered, and it is no wonder if the perpetrator of the deed afterwards went to his grave a heart broken

man. It was at this time Mr. Young committed the second and last mistake of his life. He ought to have resigned his place in such a cabinet. His own better judgment prompted him to do so. But the advice of personal friends prevailed. Among his supporters in Pictou, it might well be said that "madness ruled the hour." At the general election of 1851, Mr. Young received no nomination. At the dictation of one or two leaders in Pictou too much encouraged by the same number in New Glasgow, he was given to understand that his services were no longer required. The man that had so ably represented their County for eight years, and led them from victory to victory, was coolly laid aside. Three nobodies — Peter Ross, James Murdoch, and Andrew Robertson—were substituted in his stead. But declaration day found every one of the trio where he ought to be—at the foot of the poll. To this day there are not a few who think and speak with indignation of these doings.

During the months of August, September and October, 1852, Mr. Young addressed a series of impassioned letters to the people of Nova Scotia. The defection of Pictou friends is treated with much mildness. But not so Mr. Howe and his myrmidons. These letters were published tri-weekly, and contain samples of invective, as splendid as is to be found in the English language. The last of them was dated at Amherst, and is exclusively taken up with a sketch of the career of the great conservative chief, J. W. Johnston. As a piece of composition it was faultless, not containing a sentence that could give umbrage either to Mr. Johnston or the most sensitive of his admirers. Any newspaper editor that would, to-day, republish said letter, would confer a favour on his readers. It can be found in the *British American Journal* of the day. A new generation has since sprung up, who knew little of Mr. Johnston but the name. This letter, in glowing periods, would shew them what manner of man he was in the senate and at the bar.

Mr. Young completed a laborious, honorable and consistent career, in July, 1853, at the age of 51. He left a widowed mother, two sons, and two brothers to lament the early death, but to rejoice in the deserved fame of one who was not the least distinguished of a distinguished family. Mother and sons have disappeared in their turn. The brothers still survive. And numerous friends to whom the name of George R. Young is still dear, will be pleased to know that he himself still survives in the person of his grandchildren. One of these a noble youth, resides under the sheltering protection of George R. Young's eldest brother. And where is the Nova Scotian—no matter what his creed or colour—that would refuse to pray that this youth may long live

—"His country's wars to wage"
"And rise the Hector of the future age."

Should this youth ever see these lines, let him remember that George R. Young may be said to have laid down his life for his country. In order that Nova Scotia might enjoy the benefits arising from a constitutional government, and a pure literature, that her mines and minerals might be rescued from the grasp of a grinding monopoly, and her

fisheries protected, and her sons and daughters visit one another with railway speed, he

"Lived laborious days and scorned delights."

It has been said that Cameron of Lochiel was the Ulysses of the Highlands. George R. Young in some respects, was the Lord Brougham of Nova Scotia. And, to a certain extent, the resemblance was not a little striking. Each was distinguished for his love for laborious study and devotedness to the pursuits of literature. All their exertions, whether parliamentary, forensic, or literary, tended to promote the welfare of mankind. Through life they were pursued and misrepresented by hordes of vile detractors. After their death their worth was appreciated, and the voice of censure was changed into that of praise.

As to personal appearance, in common with the rest of the Young family, he was eminently prepossessing. Eyes large and of the colour of Homer's Minerva.* Fair haired to the last. Complexion florid, and indicating abstemious habits and the best of health. About 5 feet 11 inches in height, muscular and strong in build. There was ever a sameness in his every gesture—even in his very dress, which was always of the costliest texture. He ever had the air of one that was conscious of having *earned* what he wore.

Once, and only once, did I converse with him amidst the rugged hills of Pictou. Two years afterwards what was my astonishment to meet him on the streets of Greenock, Glasgow, and Edinburgh. Subsequently I saw him twice at his own fireside, and once in his office in Halifax. I never heard him make a speech either in parliament or elsewhere. But I used to read his speeches, together with his contributions to the *Nova Scotian* in 1838, his letters to Lord Stanley, and his work on Colonial Literature. Most of all, I was an attentive observer of his every movement during his Pictou Campaign of 1843. In these early days, with a mind chastened and refined by education, and a soul all on fire with patriotic ardour, George R. Young, in the estimation of many was "one of nature's noblemen." It is unnecessary to say that this was my opinion. Forty years have elapsed since then, during that time I have repeatedly seen and heard such men as Candlish, Guthrie, Macaulay, Lord John Russell and Chalmers, do their best in the pulpits, and from the platforms and hustings of Edinburgh. But this opinion remains unchanged.

As to the *times* of George R. Young, they were, in many respects, the Golden Age of this province. They were the days of John Young, Dr. McCulloch, and Mr. Trotter. As scholars and as authors in some of the departments of literature, these sons of Annapolis had no equals. Rev. Donald Allan Fraser was unmatched as a pulpit orator. In the columns of the *Colonial Patriot*, Jotham Blanchard manfully upheld the freedom of the press, and laid bare the iniquities of official corruption.

* The "Blue eyed Minerva."

Mr. Young and his successor did the same in the *Nova Scotian*. Through the *Pictou Observer*, Rev. Kenneth John McKenzie, in classic English, held up Pictou Academies to weekly contempt, and proved to a demonstration that responsible government meant responsible humbug. Rev. John McRae, besides preaching the gospel of "peace and good will to men," had another gospel for the Antiburghers. From love to them, he would keep them in a furor of indignation by his weekly attacks on all that was vulnerable in the career of the best and holiest of their ministers. The McCulloch's and Trotter's might now and then take up their pen to inflict merited chastisement on these disturbers of their repose. But this would not silence assailants, nor prevent the hated *Observer* from making its weekly appearance—its columns full of the raciest abuse of all the Antiburgher race.

In the midst of this "heaven upon earth," and to relieve the monotony, like a thunderclap from a clear sky, came the disruption. With the disruption came the Free Church. With the Free Church came messengers of peace from Scotland—Burnse's, McNaughton's, McIntyre's and McMillan's—to prove that the Kirk was Antichrist, that Antiburghers were no better. But, in order not to be uncharitable, there was one way of Salvation left. Of that way, however, their church held a monopoly. Of the awful stuff, in those days, preached from pulpits, this was too often the substance.

In the arena of politics there was also much life and animations. These were the days of the obstructive Sir Colin Campbell, and the haughty Falkland. Up to 1843, Hon. J. W. Johnston had not taken a very active part in public affairs. But in that year he entered the lists as a party leader, and hurled his defiance at Mr. Howe. From 1844 to 1848, with a majority of only one at his back, he held the Howe's, Young's, Huntington's and Uniacke's at bay. Since the world was first inhabited, never did legislative hall ring with more terrific Philippics. It was truly the battle of the giants. The actors in the dreadful scene were all in the prime of life. Day and night lobbies and galleries would be filled to suffocation. In these feats of intellectual gladiatorship the subject of this sketch was never backward. Others might excel him in flights of imagination. In the thorough mastery of his subject, and in the ability to defend his position by sound argument he was excelled by none.